

Message Text

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PAGE 01 OUAGAD 01240 230845Z

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-07 OPIC-03 /017 W

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R 230645Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

TO AMEMBASSY LOME

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 9634

USDOC WASHDC

AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE OUAGADOUGOU 1240

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELTN, BTIO, TO, UV

SUBJECT: LOME-BLITTA-OUAGADOUGOU RAILROAD

REF: LOME 1073

1. SUBJECT RAILROAD HAD BEEN UNDER DISCUSSION SOME YEARS AGO BUT WAS TEMPORARILY SHELVED WHILE VOLTANS-TOGOLESE CONCENTRATED ON COMPLETION FED-FINANCED UPPER VOLTAN-TOGO HIGHWAY. ACCORDING TO OFFICIALS IN MINISTRY PUBLIC WORKS/TRANSPORT, GOUV HAS RECENTLY DUSTED OFF PROJECT IN LIGHT OF RECENT DISCOVER 150 MILLION TON PHOSPHATE DEPOSIT AT ARLY. VOLTANS WOULD LIKE TO SEE IF RAILROAD LINE TO DEPOSIT SITE WOULD BE FEASIBLE. NO STUDIES HAVE YET BEEN DONE.

2. WE ARE VERY SKEPTICAL THAT THIS PROJECT WILL GET PAST IDEA STAGE. IN FIRST PLACE, MAIN PRIORITY FOR VOLTANS AT THIS POINT IS CONSTRUCTION 345 KM RAILROAD FROM OUAGA TO TAMBAO MANGANESE DEPOSIT. GOUV HAS BEEN NEGOTIATING FOR SEVERAL YEARS WITH MAJOR DONORS IN EFFORT TO GET \$70-100 MILLION REQUIRED FOR FINANCING AND HAS SUCCEEDED IN GETTING FIRM LOAN PLEDGES WORTH ABOUT \$65 MILLION. HIGHLY UNLIKELY SAME DONORS WOULD BE WILLING PUT UP CAPITAL FOR VOLTAN PORTION LOME-BLITTA-OUAGADOUGOU RAILWAY. UNDERTAKING OF THIS MAGNITUDE WOULD ALSO HAVE SERIOUS EFFECT ON GOUV'S EXISTING DEBT STRUCTURE.

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3. SECONDLY, CURSORY EXAMINATION OF POSSIBLE ECONOMIC RETURNS MAKE VIABILITY OF PROPOSED RAILROAD LOOK EVEN MORE DUBIOUS. RECORDED TRADE BETWEEN UPPER VOLTA-TOGO WAS ONLY \$346,000 IN 1972, LATEST YEAR AVAILABLE. (BY COMPARISON, TOTAL TRADE BETWEEN UPPER VOLTA-IVORY COAST WAS MORE THAN \$24 MILLION DURING SAME PERIOD.) BECAUSE OF DROUGHT, VOLTAN EXPORTS IN 1973 AND 1974 TO COASTAL COUNTRIES ARE EXPECTED TO DECLINE EVEN FURTHER. SIMILARLY TRAFFIC COUNT BETWEEN OUAGADOUGOU-LOME IS SUCH THAT SEVERAL HUNDRED MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT COULD NOT BE JUSTIFIED.

4. FINALLY, WE NOTE THE CONSTRUCTION OF RAILROAD TO OUAGADOUGOU WOULD COMPETE FOR TRAFFIC WITH FED'S NEW TWO-LAND, PAVED HIGHWAY FROM KOUPELA TO TOGO. IT IS DOUBTFUL IF THERE IS EVEN ENOUGH TRAFFIC TO MAKE ROAD PROFITABLE, LET ALONE PARALLEL RAILROAD.
GRAHAM

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CONSTRUCTION, RAILROADS, PROGRAMS (PROJECTS)
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 MAY 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: greeneet
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975OUAGAD01240
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750181-0421
From: OUAGADOUGOU
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750523/aaaaaujk.tel
Line Count: 78
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 LOME 1073
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: greeneet
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 AUG 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <11 DEC 2003 by greeneet>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LOME-BLITTA-OUAGADOUGOU RAILROAD
TAGS: ELTN, BTIO, TO, UV
To: LOME
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006